

Extracts from the End Term Review Report of SSVK

Status of Lok Shakti Sangathan

The wide spread impact of SSVK project is emergence of a 96000 membership based people organization called "Lok Shakti Sangathan" in National level covering Bihar, Jharkhand, UP and Chhatisgarh, told Surya Narayan, the state level coordinator of Bihar Lok Shakti Sangathan. It was founded in the year 1992 as a response to the local issues related to land, child labour and exploitation of landlords to Musahar community in Nauhata block of Saharsa district in north Bihar. The success soon spread to the adjacent districts and included more and more Musahar community to collectively build up a force against any form of exploitation. The women were the most vulnerable and exploited among them and this Lok Shakti Sangathan has brought changes in their life and living condition, said Rasma Devi and Ambika Devi Additional coordinator women at state level.

Objectives of Lok Shakti Sangathan:

- To create a society free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination
- To bring unity and fraternity among all
- To abolish untouchability and bring changes in culture that promote discrimination
- To bring changes in the life of women and promote local leadership

Over the years since its inception LSS has brought many changes in the life of Musahar. The Sangathan function as federated body of 1600 village based Sangathan having 32000 leaders (two from each village) to lead each village as told by Surya Narayan although there is no record or register found to substantiate this data.

Structure of LSS:

The Sangathan has the following structure starting from village to National level. Overall coordination is done by National Coordinator supported by four State Coordinator based in UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh. Three coordinators (2 women and 1 man) from each block level Sangathan functions in each of 16 covered blocks. Village level cadres leads the Sangathan at each village and Tola level. There is no district or block level set up in the structure of LSS as narrated by Surya Narayan.

Following major achievements:

- ❑ Leadership development in the area. Around 900 leaders have been trained and actively involved in the process of development in every village. Besides this 2 leaders from each of 1600 tolas, which is 3200 in total from 16 blocks have also been trained and acting as cadres of LSS.
- ❑ Releases of ponds and land – 14 ponds have been released as told by the staff and members present in the meeting. The people are now using these ponds on lease for economic activities. Similarly 189 acres of land has come under possession of the people over the years
- ❑ Around 1000 people demonstrated in front of parliament on issue of Dalit dignity and their rights to food and livelihood
- ❑ There has been a great change in cultural practices of complete bowing down before upper caste people to general namaskar with folded hands which make them feel equal with others

- ❑ Two out of 100 women nominated for noble prize at national level belongs to this area who is members of LSS.
- ❑ People's pressure on local administration and local contractors could successfully eliminated use of machine in all works meant for manual work
- ❑ There has been changes in the life of the people in terms of development of bargain power by women, understanding on their problem and
- ❑ Women leaders have been very vocal and able to confront with officials on denial of their rights and entitlements e.g. land rights movement in Naola village

Problems encountered:

1. Lack of resources primarily resource to manage their day to day affairs, travel and coordination
2. Upper cast pressure on the people
3. Threat and pressure from administration
4. There is also political threat while asserting their rights

Areas of concern:

It seems that the project has successfully created a national level plat form of Musahar community with a strong base of 96,000 memberships. If one member gives at least 5 rupees per year as membership, which is not difficult for a member to pay, it becomes around 5 lakhs per year to manage its coordination. The membership details need to be streamlined and regularized.

Village level Sangathan is the base of state or national level LSS. It has now gone up to national level having proposed action in UP, already initiated in Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh and year long base in Bihar as told by Mr. Surya Narayan, State coordinator, LSS. The membership of LSS is around 96000 covering a population of more than 5.5 lakhs as told by the State Coordinator but there is no record available to substantiate this data in any form. However the impact it has brought in Nauhata block need to be taken for larger influence.

Absence of base data or any record either in field office or in head office or at village level has limited the scope of assessing impact of this project. All most all inputs taken in this report are based on verbal statement of staff and villagers. The project has failed to keep or regularize any records at any level. The review team members could able to see village meeting register of one among 5 villages visited.

Women in more number are the members of village level sangathan but there is less representation of women at top level. There is need to balance this.

The review visited one non-DA village to have a comparative analysis of the project impact on DA villages and non-DA village. There have been changes in many areas like level of awareness has increased, people are more vocal and assertive, increasing demand for rights and entitlements and more women participation in DA villages. But subsequently when it comes physical achievements and tangible work done, non-DA village is no less in any way than the former. Out of 15 families in

Bhatrihi village, 11 families have got IAY, all of them are benefiting out of one or two social security schemes. Of course there is no formal sanghaatan in that village but there is definitely traditional leadership and the influence is visible.

LSS was more active in its initial phase than today. It came out clearly from discussion held at villages and with members and staff in the office about the work done between 1992 to 2000, mostly about land rights movements, child labour elimination work, leadership development work which had wide spread impact. All most all its achievements related by the people and staffs are of that period. There was no recent instance except assistance of financial support under RF described by the members. This indicates slow down effect of LSS as the project period increases.

¹ **Sustainability:** The project is going to be over by the end of 2006 but the community seems to be expecting its extension for at least another two – three years. They felt that the project has provided invaluable contributions in their lives. They have come a long way and want to travel further. If the support is withdrawn the momentum of the programme would be badly affected. The organization does not have sufficient fund to carry the project for next two –three years and even if it does the sustainability of the programme is questionable. Neither the organization nor the community did any planning in this regard. Until and unless the community takes bold steps like financial contribution, mobilizing resources and linking with government bodies the sustainability would be always at stake. Action Aid might consider the extension of its support for next two-three years ensuring the actions by the organization and the community for sustainability measures.